

VZCZCXRO8268
PP RUEHAG RUEHAST RUEHDA RUEHDBU RUEHDF RUEHFL RUEHIK RUEHKW RUEHLA
RUEHLN RUEHLZ RUEHPOD RUEHROV RUEHSR RUEHVK RUEHYG
DE RUEHSI #2413 2691154
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 261154Z SEP 07
FM AMEMBASSY TBILISI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7733
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

UNCLAS TBILISI 002413

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [GG](#)
SUBJECT: DIPLOMATS TURN OUT FOR CONFERENCE IN SOUTH OSSETIA

REF: TBILISI 2266

¶1. Summary: On September 21, the Georgian State Ministry for Conflict Resolution held a conference for the western diplomatic corps in the village of Tamarasheni, a Georgian-controlled village in the South Ossetian zone of conflict. The purpose of the conference was to share information with diplomats and the population of the conflict zone about Georgia's reforms, with a particular focus on the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP). State Minister for Conflict Resolution David Bakradze and head of the temporary administrative unit of South Ossetia Dimitri Sanakoyev co-hosted the conference. Representatives from all of the major western diplomatic missions in Georgia, including the British, French, German, Dutch, Italian, and European Commission Ambassadors attended. (The Russian Ambassador, in contrast, publicly denounced the conference on Georgian television and refused to attend.) The start of the conference was delayed when Russian peacekeepers stopped the convoy from Tbilisi at a checkpoint along the Georgian bypass road to Tamarasheni, claiming that the Georgian government had not notified the peacekeepers in advance. After 20 minutes, the convoy was allowed to proceed without further incident. South Ossetian de-facto president Eduard Kokoiti issued a statement following the conference saying that he would not meet with Ambassadors accredited in Georgia who traveled to Tamarasheni. End Summary.

JPKF delay diplomats' access to Tamarasheni

¶2. The convoy of approximately 20 vehicles from the diplomatic corps and Georgian government were stopped at a Russian JPKF checkpoint on the bypass road leading to the Georgian-controlled enclave of Tamarasheni. The Russian commander of the JPKF, Marat Kulakhmetov, reportedly claimed that the Georgians had not informed them in advance of the trip, and refused to let the convoy pass through the checkpoint. After 20 minutes of negotiations with OSCE acting Head of Mission Veselin Nikolaev, the convoy was allowed through.

Sanakoyev warmly welcomes ambassadors to conference

¶3. The Ambassadors and other diplomats, including a U.S. Embassy Poloff (attending because the Ambassador was in Istanbul at a regional COM conference and the DCM had another pressing commitment), were met by Sanakoyev at the front of a newly constructed theater, a symbol of the changes that the Georgian-backed administration is trying to bring to South Ossetia. (Comment: all of the major Georgian media outlets covered the conference, and made a particular point of filming Sanakoyev shaking hands with all the European Ambassadors. End comment). The conference participants, including prominent MPs, Deputy Foreign Minister Manjgaladze, and leading NGOs, gave the audience of locals and diplomats a broad overview of Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations,

including closer cooperation with the EU through the ENP and Georgia's entrance into NATO. They discussed Georgia's social, legal, and military reforms aimed at bringing Georgia in line with NATO standards. South Ossetian de-facto president Eduard Kokoiti issued a statement following the conference saying that he would not meet with Ambassadors accredited to Georgia who had traveled to Tamarasheni, adding that the Ambassadors "shared responsibility for Georgia's terrorist policy."

Comment

¶4. Though the conference agenda presented nothing more than a broad (and widely known) overview of Georgia's aspiration to join western institutions, the attendance of the major western Ambassadors and their interaction with Sanakoyev was effective in conveying the perception of greater legitimacy for the Sanakoyev administration. The conference also helped the Georgian government show the local population that the international community is interested in their situation and supports the government's path. It remains to be seen whether de-facto president Kokoiti will follow through on his threat to refuse to meet with western Ambassadors attending the conference. If so, it will cut him off from nearly all major western Ambassadors, including some who often support greater engagement with the de-facto authorities.

TEFFT